

“people’s most secret core, and their sanctuary.” Reading this collection of essays, one comes away impressed with the authentic believers’ engagement with this central life purpose.

TIMOTHY KELLY  
*Saint Vincent College*

*The Bread of the Strong: Lacouturisme and the Folly of the Cross, 1910–1985.*  
By Jack Lee Downey. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. x + 266  
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Upon meeting Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin immediately shared his “Easy Essays,” his “preferred medium of public theology—brief, pithy, semi-poetic, grammatically toxic tongue twisters about politics, holiness, and anarchism” (184). In this passage and throughout the book, Jack Lee Downey vividly conveys astute assessment with the dexterity of a historian gifted with wry wit. Desiring to develop a deeper understanding of Dorothy Day, he sets out in this book to explore the retreat movement in which she participated for thirty-five years, giving particular attention to the connections among contemplative theology, asceticism, and radical activism (12). He succeeds admirably.

“The Retreat,” as Dorothy often referred to it, grew out of the particular brand of “maximalist Christian doctrine” cultivated by the Québécois Jesuit Onésime Lacouture. Augustine, John of the Cross, and Bernard of Clairveaux figure prominently in a thick historical and cultural account of Lacouture’s ascetical theology and spiritual formation. Over against “domesticating mediocrity,” he held to the countercultural “strong meat of the Gospel,” relating his rigorist moral exhortations principally through the medium of a retreat format developed initially for clergy. Decrying all manner of creature comforts, he reserved special vitriol for the habit of smoking. In the many theological volleys with skeptics in which he and his American disciple, Fr. John Hugo, became enmeshed, their condemnation of smoking emerged as a frequent flashpoint, signifying for their critics a scrupulosity bordering on Jansenism as well as a Pelagian perfectionism (e.g., 93 and 150 ff.). For Lacouture and Hugo, this pernicious habit represented moral laxity due to insufficient motivation rooted supernaturally in God’s love. In the face of “pagan” sensuality and materialism in the church and in the dominant culture, self-mortification was an essential aspect of Jesus’ injunction to his followers to take up the cross (147).

To a laywoman who reputedly used to drink gangsters under the table (173), such emphasis on austerity mixed with contemplative spirituality

proved immensely attractive. Downey offers a nuanced assessment of the formative influence on Day's spiritual life of Frs. Hugo, Louis Farina, and Pacifique Roy through her participation in the Lacouturite retreat, a "spiritual combustion engine" for her own blend of contemplation and action. "She absorbed the perfectionist mandate to do all things in God's name, purify supernatural motives, oppose the impulse to fashion idols out of temporal phenomena; to quietly and patiently (if not always cheerfully) endure bouts of suffering, and pattern oneself on an exigent reading of the Sermon on the Mount—which Day called a 'manifesto' for all Catholics, but in an exceptional way for the Catholic Worker" (208).

Throughout the book, Downey trains a keen eye on the human condition in all its messy fragility. He points out frequently that Lacouture and Hugo could not resist—and sometimes seemed to relish—combative theological debate in defense of their approach to asceticism, even though the seductions of pride, anger, and lack of charity seemed to undercut their quest for supernatural perfection (e.g., 149, 153, 162). For her part, Dorothy Day contended with some Catholic Workers who engaged in "competitive penance" on the retreat and with others who did not share her intuitive grasp of the essential links among ascetical spiritual practice, pacifism, and voluntary poverty in the Sermon on the Mount. Many resisted participation in the Lacouturite retreat as well as her insistence on pacifism as intrinsic to the Catholic Worker form of life. Fortified by her spiritual practices, she remained steadfast, leading to her moniker as the "chief Anarch" in the Catholic Worker version of anarchy.

For scholars sharing the author's enthusiasm for fine-grained historical analysis of American Catholic theology, particularly in its more radical formulations, this text will reward close reading. For those mining the Catholic Worker literature for greater understanding of Dorothy Day's spiritual development, Downey makes an important contribution to the field by engaging key interlocutors and presenting a fresh, well-crafted perspective on the theology and significance of the Lacouturite retreat.

MARGARET R. PFEIL  
*University of Notre Dame*

*Christian Ethics at the Boundary: Feminism and Theologies of Public Life.* By Karen V. Guth. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. xi + 231 pages. \$39.00 (paper).

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Karen V. Guth has written an important book about the costs of separation in scholarship and the benefits of substantive engagement across divisions.